

across all societies worldwide. The half of the book that constitutes notes and bibliography is valuable for its breadth of summary of issues tangential to the main thesis. The notes permit the reader to keep the central issue clearly in mind and at the same time provide background information for the researcher who wishes to pursue a particular topic in depth. The book is written in an easy, readable style, without too much specialist jargon. It should appeal to a wide range of readers and draw together those from a number of disciplines who are concerned about the validity of the fatal impact thesis in the 1990s.

NANCY J. POLLOCK

Victoria University of Wellington

* * *

The History of the Pacific Islands: Kingdoms of the Reefs, by Deryck Scarr. Sydney: Macmillan, 1990. ISBN 0-7329-0209-6 cloth; 0-7329-0210-X paper; 426 pp, maps, notes, bibliography. Cloth A\$59.95, paper A\$29.95.

The Pacific has been poorly served by general histories in recent years. Kerry Howe's *Where the Waves Fall* (1984) overstated the worn "Islander oriented" perspective to the detriment of any other argument or analysis, while I. C. Campbell's *History of the Pacific Islands* (1990) was simply superficial. Scarr's effort is at once better grounded and more balanced in its coverage than either of these, and probably more useful to the postulated "general reader" so dear to publishers and booksellers, yet its very expertise may reveal the flaws of the general-history

project more starkly than did its predecessors.

The book's range is astonishing. As opposed to the few pages that preface most general works on the Pacific, there is in the first part (80 pages) a serious attempt to deal with prehistory, migrations, and oral traditions. Part 2 deals with early contact in the Marquesas and Micronesia and with late eighteenth and early nineteenth century interactions in Tahiti and Hawai'i. Part 3 explores the development of trade and settlement in the nineteenth century and concisely reviews different modes of colonialism up to the 1940s. The final part deals with the Second World War and its ramifications, the decolonization process, and political changes in the 1980s. Though many of the chapters are brief, what is captured within them is often surveyed effectively. There is an attempt to draw Micronesia, the smaller Polynesian islands, and even the New Guinea Highlands, into a review that understandably privileges Scarr's established interests in Fiji and administrative developments.

However, the range of the topics covered leads inevitably to superficiality and inaccuracy in specific areas. For instance, the implication that the graded society was general in Vanuatu, rather than specific to the north, is misleading; the further suggestion that hermaphroditic pigs were preferred for sacrifices everywhere within that area obscures significant variations in the ritual economy. It is also surprising to find reiterated the old geographical determinist argument that political centralization was impossible in the Marquesas because valleys were iso-

lated from each other; I dismissed this in a 1985 article. No doubt everyone will have their quibbles, and it is perhaps more important to consider general questions of the book's approach.

Scarr's declared emphasis is economic and political, and this excludes a good deal, in terms of both topics explored and interpretative perspectives. The interests in ordinary life and perceptions "from below" that animated popular and social history are not addressed here; the character of plantation life, whether from the perspectives of whites, Islanders, or indentured Indians, never really comes through, even though plantations and labor recruitment are discussed more extensively than, say, missions and Christianity.

Though there is a certain deference to oral history, there is no systematic effort to discriminate between indigenous and European constructions of the colonial experience. The fact that the chapters on indigenous traditions are all in the first part suggests that oral information is mainly of interest as an adjunct to prehistory, that it bears mainly on the past. The conclusion of one of these chapters is telling: Scarr notes that genealogies from Mailu Island off the southern Papuan coast suggest that first contact, when Torres' companion Tovar kidnapped fourteen children, took place around 1800; yet "the Spanish logged it as occurring on 24 August 1606" (79). This juxtaposition of a general time and a highly specific date, and the foreshortening of the tradition, implies inadequacy and inaccuracy; yet Scarr takes little interest in the more general sense in which both explorers' and local accounts can

be seen only as partial versions that represent the incident in terms inflected by a larger understanding of indigenous-foreign relations, the violence of contact, and so on. The implied relegation of indigenous perspectives to prehistory and early contact history is more troubling because it suggests that there is no particular need to make oral history central in examining more recent developments, such as the impact of the Second World War in the Pacific. Yet recent research by a number of scholars has shown how rewarding that particular avenue is.

Cultural history is similarly very marginal in this account. Perhaps it can be argued that European perceptions have been made accessible by Bernard Smith, among other writers, but a work that aims to provide a general introduction should deal more systematically with perceptions of Islanders and the transformative projects of, say, missionaries, who are so often stereotyped. Though Christianity is referred to frequently enough, there is a lack of focused discussion of either missionary culture or its influence on indigenous gender relations, domesticity, and work patterns; perhaps more important, the nature of contemporary indigenous Christianity and the significance in many areas of new sects and interdenominational conflict tend to be alluded to rather than discussed. So far as the interaction between foreign and local perspectives is concerned, the ramifications of tourist imagery and the folkloric depiction of island life might be considered.

If these areas are neglected, issues that no doubt seem more "theoretical," concerning the authority and exclusiv-

ity of this version of the islands' history, are suppressed altogether. The variety of accounts can always, it seems, be assimilated into a unitary narrative; the bird's-eye view invoked in the preface apparently draws on a great variety of partial and interested accounts, yet somehow transcends them. The aside that "their own archives can contain evidence generated by individuals hostile to governments" (viii) is virtually the only gesture toward a historiographic statement, yet goes nowhere toward acknowledging the complex politicized textuality of readings as well as documents. What the book offers seems to be an extension to the islands of the conventional kind of imperial history practiced by writers such as Fieldhouse. It takes a total view of political and economic processes; though sensitive to local complexity at an empirical level, it marginalizes nonelite perspectives; though proffering judgments, often in an opinionated fashion, it denies the inevitably politicized and contestatory character of constructing histories. This was a conservative approach in the 1960s; in 1990 it seems curiously impervious to any of the very diverse innovations and challenges that now make history in general a conflict-ridden and interesting discipline. These limitations taken into account, Scarr's introduction to the field is deft and informative, yet as a synthetic statement it distills what Pacific history has been, rather than the Pacific histories that are emerging and need to emerge.

NICHOLAS THOMAS

Australian National University

Sacred Queens and Women of Consequence: Rank, Gender, and Colonialism in the Hawaiian Islands, by Jocelyn Linnekin. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990. ISBN 0-472-09423-8 cloth; 0-472-06423-1 paper; xxiv + 276 pp, tables, figures, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. Paper US\$15.95.

Sacred Queens and Women of Consequence is a superbly crafted, multifaceted study of Hawaiian culture and early contact history that "traces the economic and political transformation of Hawaii through the first century of Western contact, focusing on changes in Hawaiian women's status and cultural valuation in the wake of Western contact and asking how women fared in the transition from sacred chieftainship to a secular, Western-dominated kingdom" (1). Well versed in several theoretical perspectives, the author, Jocelyn Linnekin, is not content to espouse any one approach exclusively. Linnekin examines Hawaiian women's lives in the round, from the cultural and symbolic aspects of ritual activity and ideological concepts of masculinity and femininity, to the materialist conditions of access to resources and material production. While not denying that the impact of the West on third world countries has frequently resulted in a decline in the status and cultural valuation of women, Linnekin does not accept that this outcome is inevitable, and argues for close contextual analysis to reveal the dynamic interplay between Western capitalist forces and local responses and resistances. The central significance of indigenous culture and praxis for Linnekin is under-